U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2014–2018

U.S. Department of Education

Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2014-2018

CONTENTS

DEPARTMENT'S MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S FY 2014–15 PRIORITY GOALS

The Department of Education has identified a limited number of priority goals that will be a particular focus over the next two years. These goals, which will help measure the success of the Department's cradle-to-career education strategy, reflect the importance of teaching and learning at all levels of the education system. These goals are consistent with the Department's five-year strategic plan, which will be used to regularly monitor and report progress. To view information on all Department programs, please visit www.ed.gov.

The effective implementation of the Department's priority and strategic goals will depend, in part, on the effective use of high-quality and timely data, including evaluations and performance measures, throughout the lifecycle of policies and programs. The Department is committed to increasing the number of programs and initiatives that are evaluated using methods that include those consistent with the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards and incorporating cost-effectiveness measures into evaluations and program improvement systems.

For more information, go to http://www.performance.gov.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S FY 2014-2015 Priority Goals
Improve students' ability to complete college By September 30, 2015, increase degree attainment among 25-34 year old age cohort to 45.6%.
Support implementation of college- and career- ready standards and assessment By September 30, 2015, at least 50 states will have adopted college and career-ready standards. By September 30, 2015, at least 50 states will be implementing next-generation assessments, aligned with college- and career-ready standards.
Improve learning by ensuring that more students have effective teachers and leaders By September 30, 2015, at least 37 of states will have fully implemented teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that consider multiple measures of effectiveness, with student growth as a significant factor.
Turn around and close achievement gaps in low-performing schools By September 30, 2015, decrease the number of high schools with low graduation rates to 1285.
Support comprehensive early learning assessment systems By September 30, 2015, at least 9 states will be collecting and reporting disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S FY 2014-2015 Priority Goals
Ensure equitable educational opportunities   By September 30, 2015, increase the national high school graduation rate to 83%, as measured by the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate; Decrease disparities in the national high school graduation rate among minority students, students with disabilities, English Learners, and students in poverty.
Enable evidence-based decision making   By September 30, 2015, at least 11% of select new[1] (non-continuation) discretionary grant dollars will reward evidence.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S FY 2014-2018 STRATEGIC GOALS

The six Department Strategic Goals will guide the day-to-day work of the Department's staff.

1. **Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education.** Increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults.
2. **Elementary and Secondary Education.** Improve the elementary and secondary education system's ability to consistently deliver excellent instruction aligned with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and ensure all students graduate high school college- and career-ready.
3. **Early Learning.** Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.
4. **Equity.** Increase educational opportunities for and reduce discrimination against underserved students so that all students are well-positioned to succeed.
5. **Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System.** Enhance the education system's ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread use of data, research and evaluation, evidence, transparency, innovation, and technology.
6. **U.S. Department of Education Capacity.** Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement this Strategic Plan.

Notes: Per the *GPRA Modernization Act* requirement to address Cross-Agency Priority Goals in the agency strategic plan, the annual performance plan and the annual performance report, please refer to www.performance.gov for the agency's contributions to those goals and progress where applicable.

---

[1] New grant dollars that "reward evidence" include all dollars awarded as a result of addressing tiered-evidence as either eligibility threshold (e.g. i3 competition), absolute priority, competitive priority (earning at least one point for it), or selection criteria (earning at least one point for it).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S STRATEGIC GOALS FOR FY 2014–2018

As mentioned in the previous section, this Plan links the Department's day-to-day work to the Department's goals. The day-to-day work is organized into six goals related to the organization of the Department. Priorities are not intended to signify their relative importance; success on each will be necessary to ensure that the Department is maximizing its impact on the education system.

This Plan will help to align the Administration's yearly budget requests and the Department's legislative agenda. Continuous improvement rests in large part on an ongoing cycle of assessing performance, examining data, and improving practices. Creating a culture of continuous improvement is at the heart of our efforts to work with and support elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educators and policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels.

Accomplishing all of this Plan's priorities will require strong coordination and collaboration from Department staff working with Congress, partners at the state and local levels, and all other stakeholders. This includes meeting numerous legislative challenges. In addition, state and federal fiscal constraints may impact the Department's ability to provide the necessary incentives and resources to increase quality, transparency, and accountability.

Goal 1: Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education. Increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults.

> **Strategic Objective 1.1: Access and Affordability.** Close the opportunity gap by improving the affordability of and access to college and/or workforce training, especially for underrepresented and/or underprepared populations (e.g., low-income and first-generation students, English learners, individuals with disabilities, adults without high school diplomas, etc.).

> **Strategic Objective 1.2: Quality.** Foster institutional value to ensure that postsecondary education credentials represent effective preparation for students to succeed in the workforce and participate in civic life.

> **Strategic Objective 1.3: Completion.** Increase degree and certificate completion and job placement in high-need and high-skill areas, particularly among underrepresented and/or underprepared populations.

> **Strategic Objective 1.4: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Pathways.** Increase STEM pathway opportunities that enable access to and completion of postsecondary programs.

Goal 2: Elementary and Secondary Education. Improve the elementary and secondary education system's ability to consistently deliver excellent instruction aligned with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and ensure all students graduate high school college- and career-ready.

Strategic Objective 2.1: Standards and Assessments. Support implementation of internationally-benchmarked college- and career-ready standards, with aligned, valid, and reliable assessments.

Strategic Objective 2.2: Effective Teachers and Strong Leaders. Improve the preparation, recruitment, retention, development, support, evaluation, and recognition of effective teachers and leaders.

Strategic Objective 2.3: School Climate and Community. Increase the success, safety, and health of students, particularly in high-need schools, and deepen family and community engagement.

Strategic Objective 2.4: Turn Around Schools and Close Achievement Gaps. Accelerate achievement by supporting states and districts in turning around low-performing schools and closing achievement gaps, and developing models of next generation high schools.

Strategic Objective 2.5: Stem Teaching and Learning. Increase the number and quality of STEM teachers and increase opportunities for students to access rich STEM learning experiences.

Goal 3: Early Learning. Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.

Strategic Objective 3.1: Access to High-Quality Programs and Services. Increase access to high-quality early learning programs and comprehensive services, especially for children with high needs.

Strategic Objective 3.2: Effective Workforce. Improve the quality and effectiveness of the early learning workforce so that early childhood educators have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to improve young children's health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes.

Strategic Objective 3.3: Measuring Progress, Outcomes, and Readiness. Improve the capacity of states and early learning programs to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems.

Goal 4: Equity. Increase educational opportunities for and reduce discrimination against underserved students so that all students are well-positioned to succeed.

Strategic Objective 4.1: Equitable Educational Opportunities. Increase all students' access to educational opportunities and remove barriers that students face based on their race, ethnicity, or national origin; sex; sexual orientation or gender identity; disability; English language ability; religion; socioeconomic status; or geographical location.

Strategic Objective 4.2: Civil Rights Compliance. Ensure educational institutions' awareness of and compliance with federal civil rights obligations and enhance the public's knowledge of their civil rights

Goal 5: Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System. Enhance the education system's ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread use of data, research and evaluation, evidence, transparency, innovation, and technology.

> **Strategic Objective 5.1: Data Systems and Transparency.** Facilitate the development of interoperable longitudinal data systems for early learning through employment to enable data-driven, transparent decision making by increasing access to timely, reliable, and high-value data.

> **Strategic Objective 5.2: Privacy.** Provide all education stakeholders, from early childhood to adult learning, with technical assistance and guidance to help them protect student privacy while effectively managing and using student information.

> **Strategic Objective 5.3: Research, Evaluation, and Use of Evidence.** Invest in research and evaluation that builds evidence for education improvement; communicate findings effectively; and drive the use of evidence in decision-making by internal and external stakeholders.

> **Strategic Objective 5.4: Technology and Innovation.** Accelerate the development and broad adoption of new, effective programs, processes, and strategies, including education technology.

Goal 6: U.S. Department of Education Capacity. Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement this strategic plan.

> **Strategic Objective 6.1: Effective Workforce.** Continue to build a skilled, diverse, and engaged workforce within the Department.

> **Strategic Objective 6.2: Risk Management.** Improve the Department's program efficacy through comprehensive risk management, and grant and contract monitoring.

> **Strategic Objective 6.3: Implementation and Support.** Build Department capacity and systems to support states' and other grantees' implementation of reforms that result in improved outcomes, and keep the public informed of promising practices and new reform initiatives.

> **Strategic Objective 6.4: Productivity and Performance Management.** Improve workforce productivity through information technology, performance management systems, and leadership and knowledge management practices.

GOAL 1: POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION, AND ADULT EDUCATION. Increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults.

Dramatically boosting completion rates for bachelor's and associate degrees is essential for Americans to compete in a global economy. The President thus set a goal in 2009—that, by 2020, the U.S. will have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. Meeting this goal will require millions of additional Americans to earn a bachelor's or an associate degree or certificate by the end of this decade—a 50 percent increase nationwide. The President has also challenged every American to complete at least one year of higher education or career training—at a two- or four-year postsecondary institution, or through a vocational training program or apprenticeship.

The President's agenda for postsecondary reform calls for a spirit of shared responsibility in addressing college access, affordability, quality, and the imperative for students to complete their certificates or degrees. Neither the federal government alone, nor any other single sector, can make the investments or create changes needed to move our country forward. This work requires unprecedented collaboration and innovation.

And, increased college enrollment is not enough. To advance the nation toward achieving the 2020 goal, institutions of higher education must ensure that students successfully complete with degrees and certificates. In addition, as part of its career and technical education (CTE) transformation strategy, the Department must help support state- and industry-led efforts to introduce students to careers and provide them with the knowledge and skills to enter technical fields. Furthermore, to ensure a sustainable national economy, the Department should work with the National Science Foundation and other agencies to help colleges and universities increase the enrollment and completion rates of students with degrees and certificates in fields related to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

The Department must ensure that all students—recent high school graduates and adult learners alike—are well prepared for college and careers, help more of them enroll in postsecondary education, and increase the number of those who complete programs of study with a degree or certificate.

Prior to entering postsecondary education, prospective students need easily accessible information on the cost of attendance, career placement and graduation rates, college loan default rates, earnings of graduates, public-service and private-sector opportunities, loan management options, and other subjects crucial to understanding the affordability and value of the postsecondary institutions and/or programs of study that they are considering. Students deserve to know that, whether they enter a college, university, postsecondary career training program, or adult education program, the credential they earn will be affordable and its value will be recognized as an indication that they possess the necessary knowledge and skills for success in the workplace and in life.

Providing federal student aid in a simple, reliable, and efficient manner is the main way that the Department supports college access, affordability, quality, and completion. In FY 2012, the Department delivered nearly $142 billion in grants, work-study, and loan assistance to approximately 15 million postsecondary students and their families. These students attended

approximately 6,200 institutions of postsecondary education accredited by dozens of agencies. In addition, the Department administers $2 billion annually in grants to strengthen postsecondary institutions and promote college readiness, and another $2 billion in grant funds for CTE, adult education (including literacy and citizenship education), and correctional education to help adults secure the skills that equip them for work, civic participation, and lifelong learning.

The Department has already taken significant steps to increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion. Through the SAFRA Act, passed as part of the *Healthcare and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010* (*HCERA*), Congress ended student loan subsidies to banks, saving billions of dollars that are now used for financial aid through the Pell Grant program and for reducing borrowers' monthly repayment amounts. Resources developed by the Department, such as the College Affordability and Transparency Center, the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet, the College Scorecard, and a consolidated student aid website from the Department's Federal Student Aid office (www.studentaid.gov), now provide students and families with better tools for informed decision-making. In addition, the Department has simplified the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) so it is easier and faster for students to apply for aid. During the next four years, the Department will build on these efforts to ensure that all Americans, regardless of background, will have the opportunity to access and complete an affordable postsecondary degree or other postsecondary credential.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in improving college access and affordability, college completion, academic quality, and STEM pathway opportunities.

Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education Indicators of Success

- Reduce rate of increase in average net price of public two- and four-year institutions
- Decrease number of low-performing institutions
- Increase degree attainment among 25-34 year old age cohort
- Increase retention rate of first-time degree-seeking undergraduates
- Increase number of STEM postsecondary credentials awarded

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

The Department will encourage states and institutions of higher education to adopt policies and strategies to improve student outcomes and even out or minimize increases in the cost of tuition, books, and related items. Success will depend, to some degree, on the extent to which states and institutions (a) implement policies and programs to increase student retention and persistence to graduation, (b) accelerate college completion, (c) offer dual high school and postsecondary enrollments, (d) develop and use online, open-source materials, (e) better align high school completion and postsecondary entrance requirements, (f) better align transfer requirements that lead to baccalaureate degrees, and (g) invest in higher education at the state level. The Department has limited ability to influence such outcomes without new programs that are specifically structured to drive this kind of change. In addition, modifications to

statewide longitudinal and other data systems are necessary to better track the nation's progress in improving access to postsecondary education, completion of postsecondary degrees and certificates, and success in the workforce and society. Finally, high-quality technical assistance is needed to address the limited capacity of states and school districts to advance programs in high-need areas, such as STEM.

The nation also sorely needs the reauthorization of key federal legislation, including the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (*ESEA*), the *Workforce Investment Act* (*WIA*), the *Higher Education Act* (*HEA*), and the *Career and Technical Education Act* (*CTEA*), in order to support the implementation of more rigorous high school standards and postsecondary and adult education reforms that will increase student achievement and career and civic success. Moreover, postsecondary institutions must increase their capacity to serve the growing number of Americans who require education and/or training beyond high school to compete in the workplace, particularly the tens of millions of Americans who have basic literacy and workforce training needs. In an economy where state funding for higher education is threatened, institutions are struggling to serve more students with fewer resources. In addition, many students arrive at college unprepared for college-level work. This need for remediation diverts resources that would be better directed toward supporting students' persistence in and completion of their education. To be effective in all of these areas, postsecondary institutions must continue to find ways to be innovative and productive in providing educational services— even as they collaborate with the pre-K – 12 sector to improve the college- and career-readiness of learners.

> **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.1: ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY. Close the opportunity gap by improving the affordability of and access to college and/or workforce training, especially for underrepresented and/or underprepared populations (e.g., low-income and first-generation students, English learners, individuals with disabilities, adults without high school diplomas, etc.).**
>
> Postsecondary education access—and success—can be achieved only if students complete high school or its equivalent, and postsecondary education and training are relevant and affordable. Today, too many of the nation's students are ill-prepared for the academic rigor required for success at a postsecondary institution, with 38% enrolling in remedial courses during their first or second year.[2] Others lack the financial resources to pay for higher education. The average net price has risen at many two- and four-year institutions, particularly at public colleges and universities, widening the affordability gap.[3] During the past ten years, published college prices at public four-year institutions rose more rapidly than the cost of other goods and services.[4] Over the past three decades, average tuition and fees at a public four-year college have increased 257%, while incomes for typical families grew only 16%.[5]
>
> By implementing a variety of measures, the Department can help keep postsecondary education available and affordable to the middle class, as well as to students from low-

---

[2] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study – NPSAS:08.
[3] U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2013-170, March 2013: *College Costs – A Decade of Change: 2002-03 to 2011-12*
[4] Ibid.
[5] *Trends in College Pricing 2012*, The College Board; U.S. Census Bureau.

income families. Some examples include: providing more and better information about postsecondary institutions that offer good value, serve high-need students well, and put into practice cost containment strategies; furthering the Department's usability and transparency efforts (through FAFSA enhancements, College Scorecard and other consumer tools, and related measures); enhancing financial aid policies and regulations that address student loan modifications, income-based repayment, tax benefits, and campus-based aid. Other steps range from strengthening federal student aid accountability and compliance mechanisms which help keep students and families from assuming too much debt and which safeguard taxpayer investments in the student aid program, to holding institutions responsible as partners with states and the federal government for providing students with a quality education. The Department will also continue to strengthen the customer service provided by Federal Student Aid to serve the interests of students.

The Department is further concerned about the sizable number of adults who lack foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Because of this, too many adults cannot enter or complete a postsecondary education or training program. Data on educational attainment and skills show that there are at least 30 million Americans without basic literacy skills in need of educational credentials for work.[6] The social and economic consequences are severe for these adults and their families, as well as for their communities, where large numbers of low-skilled adults can limit economic development. The current adult education system is not equipped to handle this challenge, serving less than 3 percent of the need.[7] The Department will work to transform this system and create an adult learning infrastructure that better meets the demand for high-quality English language, literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills. This infrastructure must accommodate the increased demand for skills from industry and business, as well as for services that may result from comprehensive immigration reform.

The Department will work with all stakeholders throughout the education and career pipelines to improve educational opportunity, including increasing the academic readiness of students for postsecondary education and employment. The Department will also support the adoption of internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards so that high school students graduate with the competencies needed for postsecondary success. In addition, the Department will provide useful information on financial aid and institutional characteristics to facilitate sound decision making by students and families.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.2: QUALITY. Foster institutional value to ensure that postsecondary education credentials represent effective preparation for students to succeed in the workforce and participate in civic life.

For the United States to remain educationally and economically competitive, its institutions must exemplify and deliver a quality postsecondary education. They must

---

[6] U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.
[7] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, internal estimate based on number of adults served compared to target population.

also ensure that the degrees and credentials they confer meet the economic and social needs of individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole. An important part of the Department's work must be to encourage the postsecondary community to focus on student learning that is transparent and validated through the assessment of actual learning outcomes. This will, in turn, encourage institutions and other education providers to use outcomes, rather than simply inputs, to measure and demonstrate quality and value. If the nation is to improve quality for large numbers of students, States and institutions of higher education must adopt instructional innovations that increase quality and affordability. It will be critical to foster improvements in how data are collected and used in postsecondary education, not only to accurately gauge quality learning but also to determine what strategies work best to increase educational attainment and completion.

The Department has undertaken initial efforts to streamline the focused review process for accreditation, a voluntary peer review system that institutions use to ensure educational quality. The Department does not accredit institutions of higher education, but rather provides oversight by recognizing the agencies that accredit such institutions and ensuring that these accrediting agencies adhere to certain standards. President Obama has called for greater focus on affordability and value in quality assurance. The Department will therefore propose further enhancements to its accreditation oversight responsibilities and offer new pathways to ensure that learning outcomes leading to degrees and certificates are better documented and understood by the public.

The Department will continue to encourage the development and implementation of statewide longitudinal data systems that include postsecondary education and workforce information. It will also continue to develop and enhance the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to improve its data presentation and visualization functions. The aim is to improve access to the data and the ability to analyze changes to, and diversity of, student populations.

The Department will also continue to fund and support teacher preparation initiatives to improve teacher quality—and student achievement—by furthering the transformation already under way in the recruitment, training, and professional development of teachers. The nation needs well-prepared teachers to educate all students, including those with high needs, such as English language learners, children who struggle with reading, and students with disabilities. With the Department's support, teacher preparation programs will be held to clear standards of quality that include, but are not limited to, their records of preparing and placing teachers who deliver positive results for students.

Better and more transparent information, coupled with incentives to support the quality and validity of education at postsecondary institutions, will increase the confidence of students, families, and states in the value and integrity of these institutions. The Department will promote information about successful evidence-based programs and strategies, use its statutory and regulatory authority to strengthen program integrity, foster better use of data, and encourage states and institutions to set and monitor goals to improve student, institutional, and statewide performance in postsecondary education.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.3: COMPLETION. Increase degree and certificate completion and job placement in high-need and high-skill areas, particularly among underrepresented and economically disadvantaged populations.

The success of the American economy and culture—as well as our national security--depends on the talent of all Americans. The President is committed to increasing the number of students earning degrees and credentials through postsecondary education and has encouraged every American to complete at least one year of education or workforce training beyond high school. One-third of postsecondary students drop out within four years without completing a degree or certificate[8], and more than 30 million adults function at low literacy levels that inhibit their ability to succeed in college and the workforce.[9] Ensuring that all Americans have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in college and in the workforce will require higher standards of educational excellence, leading to dramatically improved high school and adult education outcomes, which, in turn, will lead to postsecondary outcomes that produce more graduates with certificates and degrees.

To meet the needs of the labor market, where the demand for high-skilled workers in many fields is projected to outpace the number of qualified applicants, the Department will work to support the education and training of individuals in high-need and high-skill career fields, such as health care, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, information technology, and STEM.

There is also a growing need to fill so-called "middle jobs"—jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree; provide a secure middle-class salary; and encourage continued education and career mobility, enabling workers to "learn as they earn." The President is committed to leveraging these jobs to provide gateways to opportunity for more Americans.

High-quality CTE systems can help address these factors, by actively engaging students in learning; giving them an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in real-world contexts; and connecting them with the right menu of postsecondary options and high-demand occupations. Effective CTE programs allow students to master three types of skills: academic skills; technical skills in a given field; and the transferable career skills that characterize today's knowledge worker, like critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, and teamwork. The Department will promote state and local CTE models that are well-aligned with college- and career-readiness standards, and with the needs of employers, industry, and labor.

The Department is particularly determined to have a significant impact on improving the educational performance of students most in need of help—e.g., those from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged populations, and first-generation students (that is, those who are the first in their families to attend college)—by working with stakeholders on programs that increase postsecondary persistence and

---

[8] U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, Beginning Postsecondary Students Survey – BPS:04/09. [FOOTNOTE TO BE UPDATED]
[9] Ibid.

completion. For example, the Department will provide funding for and disseminate information on strategies that foster successful transitions, including transitions between secondary and postsecondary education, two-year and four-year colleges and universities, postsecondary education and employment, and/or postsecondary pathways within or across career fields. Success will require better research and data analysis about effective persistence and completion strategies in postsecondary settings and strong communication efforts.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.4: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS PATHWAYS. Increase STEM pathway opportunities that enable access to and completion of postsecondary programs.

The 2012 President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) report to the president, *Engage to Excel: Producing One Million Additional College Graduates with Degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics,* calls for modernizing pathways to postsecondary completion that incorporate best practices in retention and persistence of students in STEM fields. In this report, it is estimated that almost half of all students who start their postsecondary degree in a STEM field will not finish there, either because they have dropped out (about 20 percent of all beginning STEM students) or switched to another major (about 28 percent).

The Department will support the development of innovative solutions that encourage students to select and complete STEM majors once they get to college, including exposure to and preparation in STEM fields through investments in career and technical education, career pathways, and transition strategies (including from community colleges and certification programs).

Concomitantly, the Department will prioritize internal efforts that encourage clearer alignment between high school and college STEM fields of study and that improve retention and persistence to high school and college graduation. Toward this end, creating STEM pathway options for high school students seeking in-depth exposure to technical knowledge and skill development can be accomplished by expanding successful models, including career academies and STEM-focused career and technical education, that help build both college and career readiness. Similarly, the Department will enhance STEM pathways for adults (first-time STEM workers, re-entry into the STEM workforce at all levels, veterans, etc.) by supporting the development of bridge programs with industry and partner agencies that will enable significant advancement toward the goal of increasing the number of STEM graduates.

STEM teacher preparation also needs dramatic improvement to increase the number and quality of K–12 STEM teachers as well as college and university STEM professors. STEM researchers have already identified a wide variety of best practices from universities and community colleges that can improve the pipeline to completion, and that can be replicated and scaled to increase STEM degree production by 2020.

In alignment with the Five-Year Federal Strategic Plan on STEM education and the Administration's government-wide STEM education reorganization proposal, the Department will also leverage partnerships with other Committee on STEM (CoSTEM)

agencies, including the National Science Foundation which has been designated the lead CoSTEM agency working on undergraduate STEM education, to leverage existing and proposed programs that support postsecondary STEM education to increase the quality of STEM learning and make pathways in these majors more engaging and attainable. The goal will be to increase the quality of STEM learning and make pathways in these majors more engaging and attainable. The Department will especially focus on investments that target underrepresented students to increase their recruitment, retention, and completion.

GOAL 2: ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION. Improve the elementary and secondary education system's ability to consistently deliver excellent instruction aligned with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and ensure all students graduate high school college- and career-ready.

The goal for America's educational system is clear: every student should graduate from high school ready for college and a career. Every student should have meaningful opportunities from which to choose upon graduation from high school. Over the past few years, states, districts, and schools have initiated groundbreaking reforms and innovations to try to meet this goal. For the first time, almost every state is supporting higher standards that will demonstrate that students are truly college- and career-ready. States are also coming together to develop the next generation of assessments that are not only aligned with these new standards but also advance essential skills that promote critical thinking, problem solving, and the application of knowledge. At the same time, states, districts, and schools are working to meet the challenges of putting a highly-qualified teacher in every classroom and a strong and effective leader in every school; building local capacity to support successful school turnarounds; redesigning high school education by building stronger connections among secondary education, postsecondary education, and the workplace; and improving teacher preparation and classroom instruction in STEM education.

But, while many schools are increasing the quality of instruction and improving academic achievement, there is also broad agreement that the U.S. education system fails to consistently provide all students with the excellent education necessary to achieve college- and career-readiness. The result is that too many U.S. students are failing to reach their full potential. Recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores show that low-income students are "roughly two years of learning behind the average better-off student of the same age." Also, according to the 2009 McKinsey report *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in American Schools*, on average, "black and Latino students are roughly two to three years of learning behind white students of the same age."

Many children, particularly low-income children, students with disabilities, English learners, and children of color confront not only an achievement gap but also an opportunity gap. Today, a student in a school with high-minority enrollment is much less likely to go to a school that offers calculus and physics than a student in a high school with low minority enrollment. Less than 8 percent of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) mathematics or AP science courses today are African American. Closing the opportunity gap will require that school resources, talent, and spending be targeted to the kids who need help the most.

The Department's elementary and secondary education reforms focus on the building blocks needed for schools, school districts, and states to more consistently deliver excellent classroom instruction for all students. The foundation of these reforms is a system for improving learning and teaching that aligns with internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards, high-quality formative and summative assessments, and engaging and effective instructional content. Ensuring that U.S. students have the critical thinking skills and other tools they need to be effective in the 21st-century economy means improving teaching and learning in all content areas—from literacy, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to history, civics and government, geography, foreign languages, the arts, economics and financial literacy, environmental education, computer science, health education, and other subjects.

A strong reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (*ESEA*)that reinforces and extends the progress already being made to strengthen the quality of elementary and secondary education would further this goal.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in helping states and school districts deliver excellent instruction that is aligned with rigorous standards while ensuring effective support services that help students graduate college- and career-ready.

Elementary and Secondary Education Indicators of Success

- Increase number of states that have adopted college- and career-ready standards
- Increase number of states that are implementing next-generation assessments, aligned with college- and career-ready standards
- Increase number of states that have fully implemented teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that consider multiple measures of effectiveness, with student growth as a significant factor
- Decrease use of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and alternative school placements and reduce disparities in the rates these sanctions are applied to students with disabilities and youth of color
- Decrease number of high schools with low graduation rates
- Increase percentage of priority schools that have met the state exit criteria and exited priority school status
- Increase percentage of focus schools that have met the state exit criteria and exited focus school status
- Increase number of STEM post-secondary credentials awarded
- Increase percentage of teachers who teach STEM as their main assignment and who hold a corresponding undergraduate degree
- Increase number of public high school graduates who have taken at least one STEM Advanced Placement exam

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

States are moving forward in implementing important reforms to increase student achievement, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction. Yet, efforts to implement college- and career-ready standards and new, aligned assessments, to acquire higher-quality

instructional materials, and to develop and implement teacher and school leader evaluation systems, have run up against resource limitations. Developing and administering the next generation of assessments and supporting teachers and leaders through training related to the new standards will require continuing financial support, in addition to expert technical assistance, in order to help states tackle these new and complex reforms in a manner tailored to their unique needs. Similarly, states face challenges in turning around a large number of our lowest-performing schools, and in sustaining growth and improvement as grant funding declines. Finally, the pace of reforms may be dictated in part by future Congressional appropriations and the extent to which the reauthorization of *ESEA* requires rigorous interventions in each state's lowest-achieving schools.

In the current economic climate, student needs often are growing while school budgets are contracting. Expanding services and supports to address students' mental, emotional and behavioral health, and to create positive school environments where all students can learn and excel will be a challenge. Cross-agency collaboration helps to connect agency programs and leverage community assets, but additional resources are needed to bring to scale effective school-based practices that support students struggling with trauma and poverty, improve student behavior, and increase campus safety.

To achieve the STEM goals, there needs to be improved coordination among federal agencies. In addition, high-quality, STEM-specific technical assistance is needed to address the limited capacity of some states and school districts to lead STEM-related programs. Finally, more states and districts must adopt rigorous STEM standards that will prepare students to succeed in these fields at the postsecondary level.

> **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.1: STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS. Support implementation of internationally-benchmarked college- and career-ready standards, with aligned, valid, and reliable assessments.**
>
> Clear, high expectations for what students need to know and be able to do, and high-quality assessments that accurately measure student performance against those expectations, are essential for the nation to ensure high student achievement and prepare a skilled workforce.
>
> States have recognized the need to improve the rigor and quality of their standards and assessments. Since 2009, 45 states and the District of Columbia have partnered in a states-led effort to develop common, internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards in English, language arts, and mathematics. In addition, three states are implementing their own college-and career-ready standards that have been approved by their state's network of institutions of higher education. With such standards in place, educators are designing instructional strategies to engage students and implementing support systems to strengthen college- and career-ready skills for all students, including those with disabilities and English learners. The Department will leverage federal investments, including Titles I, II, and III of the *ESEA*, as well as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*), and provide guidance and technical assistance to states to ensure that teachers and principals are well prepared and students have the resources and support needed to graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

The college- and career-ready standards must be coupled with high-quality formative and summative assessments to measure the extent to which students are mastering the standards. The assessments must also provide students, families, and teachers with timely, relevant, and actionable information about student learning over time. This approach will improve teaching and learning and will create more transparent systems of accountability. To this end, the Department is funding consortia of states to develop the next generation of standardized assessments in English, language arts, and mathematics, alternative assessments for individuals with severe cognitive impairments, and assessments of English language proficiency.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.2: EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND STRONG LEADERS. Improve the preparation, recruitment, retention, development, support, evaluation, and recognition of effective teachers and leaders.

It is well established that teacher effectiveness contributes more to improving student academic outcomes than any other in-school characteristic. It is also widely recognized that a strong school leader influences a positive and nurturing learning community in which students and teachers thrive.

In light of the importance of teachers and school leadership for student success, the nation must do more to ensure that every student has an effective teacher in every classroom, every school has an effective leader, and every teacher and leader has access to high-quality preparation, ongoing support, recognition, and collaboration opportunities he or she needs to excel. The Department will help strengthen the profession by supporting efforts that focus on actionable feedback, support, and incentives at every stage of a career, based on fair evaluation systems that consider multiple measures, including student growth. The Department will support state and district efforts that provide time for educators to collaborate, on-the-job learning opportunities, and professional advancement.

The Department will also focus on ensuring that students in low-achieving and high-need schools, students with disabilities and English learners are taught by highly qualified and effective teachers in schools designed for success and led by effective leaders. While public schools hire thousands of teachers each year, almost half of teachers leave teaching within five years.[10] For this reason, the Department will pay special attention to teacher recruitment, preparation, and induction as critical levers to improve the overall effectiveness of the teaching workforce and the retention of greater numbers of teachers. When effective teachers and leaders work collaboratively in focused learning communities, they can make dramatic differences in closing achievement gaps. Thus, the Department will increase its efforts to strengthen school leadership and place a special emphasis on creating conditions for collective success, especially in low-achieving and high-need schools.

---

[10] Ingersoll, Richard and Merrill, Lisa (May 2012). *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force*. University of Pennsylvania and Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.3: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY. Increase the success, safety, and health of students, particularly in high-need schools, and deepen family and community engagement.

Students can succeed despite being born into the most difficult of circumstances, be it community and domestic violence, high rates of poverty, or other challenges. For these youths to have the best chance for academic success, it is imperative to create safe school climates that support active academic engagement through comprehensive, evidence-based supports for student physical, mental, and behavioral well-being. Too many students, including traumatized youth, and students with disabilities, suffer from troubling rates of school violence and exclusionary discipline practices (e.g., suspension, expulsion, referral to law enforcement). Preparing students for success is made easier when they have access to trained school staff that can help them develop effective social, emotional, and behavioral skills, and address trauma and challenges to their mental health. It is also made easier when students are well-fed and have regular opportunities for physical activity.

Success requires consistent assessment of the extent to which students are safe, healthy, and engaged in school; a comprehensive set of supports matched to student needs; and a deliberate effort to maintain campus security. The Department will support efforts to accurately monitor and improve school climate, especially in high-need schools, by providing templates and technical assistance for school climate assessments and by helping districts to bring the implementation of multi-tiered behavioral frameworks, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), to scale. Equipped with good information on school climate, states and districts can implement supports to improve students' behavior while also reducing school violence and school discipline practices that unnecessarily remove students from the classroom. While supportive school climates are a school's first line of defense against traumatic events, the Department will also provide guidance, technical assistance, and financial support to help states and districts develop high-quality emergency management plans that can be implemented with confidence and fidelity.

To address the diversity of student academic, behavioral, and mental health needs, schools need strong partnerships with the families and communities they serve. In high-poverty neighborhoods, the Department will support community-wide, place-based, data-driven approaches that address interrelated barriers to learning and provide comprehensive supports for students and their families to increase socioeconomic mobility. This can be achieved by building a cradle-through-college-to-career continuum of academic programs, and family and community supports, which engage a broad set of community partners, including housing authorities, law enforcement, and local health agencies, with strong schools at the center. This type of comprehensive approach can improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in the most distressed communities. Further, the Department will develop a dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships with recommendations on how to increase family and school staff capacity to engage in ongoing, effective partnerships–to guide the Department's efforts to improve family engagement policy and practice.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.4: TURN AROUND SCHOOLS AND CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS. Accelerate achievement by supporting states and districts in turning around and closing achievement gaps in low-performing schools, and developing models of next generation high schools.

Far too many of the nation's children attend schools that fail to provide them with a high-quality education year after year. National attention and support focused on these persistently lowest-achieving schools in each state—the bottom 5 percent of all schools—can help ensure that all students in these schools are receiving the education they deserve. These schools, which are in urban, rural, and suburban communities, have patterns of extremely low achievement rates, have shown no improvement over multiple years, and have unacceptably low graduation rates. For example, at the high school level, there are over 1,400 "dropout factories" from which fewer than 60 percent of entering freshmen actually graduate.

Examples of successful turnarounds suggest that low-achieving schools that dramatically improve student outcomes rely on common strategies, including building a positive culture of high expectations; ensuring strong leadership and staff who are committed to dramatically increasing student achievement; supporting effective instructional teams through focused and intensive professional development; strengthening the instructional program; extending learning time; engaging families and communities; and changing governance to provide flexibility for needed reforms. Through School Improvement Grants (SIG) and other Department programs, states and districts now have significant resources to dramatically improve these schools by implementing intensive intervention models that employ strategies such as these. By working with the SIG grantees, the Department will identify schools demonstrating improvement on leading indicators so they may help inform school improvement efforts in other persistently low-achieving schools.

Recognizing that too often a student's zip code predetermines the quality of the education he or she receives, it is vital for states and districts to disaggregate performance data by income status to ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality education as evidenced by their performance. In schools with large and persistent achievement gaps, states and districts will identify and implement targeted interventions and supports to turn around performance, close persistent achievement gaps, and substantially improve student learning outcomes—for all students and for identified subgroups. The Department will track the progress of these schools and subpopulations, and hold states accountable for their commitment to closing achievement gaps.

Improving its high schools is a critical step for ensuring that America remains competitive in today's global economy. Today's high school students are tomorrow's engineers, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders who must be critical thinkers and able to find solutions to complex and emerging challenges. High schools must provide them with a rigorous and relevant education that prepares them to meet the demands of college and careers.

Yet many of America's students are not meaningfully engaged or motivated in their academic experiences while in high school, and many who graduate lack exposure to the relevant learning that bridges their classroom work with future college experiences and careers. To provide students with challenging and relevant academic and career-related learning experiences that prepare them for postsecondary education and careers, the Department will reemphasize its commitment to ensuring that all graduating students are ready for college and careers by supporting innovative high school designs focused on this goal.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.5: STEM TEACHING AND LEARNING. Increase the number and quality of STEM teachers and increase opportunities for students to access rich STEM learning experiences.

In his 2011 State of the Union address, President Obama announced the goal of preparing 100,000 excellent STEM teachers over the next decade and encouraged partners from across the country to come together to improve STEM teaching and learning. The recommendation of focusing on STEM teachers was drawn from the 2010 PCAST report to the president, *Prepare and Inspire: K–12 Education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) for America's Future.* According to this report, "…the most important factor in ensuring excellence is great STEM teachers, with both deep content knowledge in STEM subjects and mastery of the pedagogical skills required to teach these subjects well." More and higher quality STEM training, for both pre- and in-service teachers, will provide a stronger support system for STEM teachers to increase their effectiveness and retention. Developing new STEM teachers and implementing ways to retain highly-effective STEM educators are critical components of how the Department will work to improve STEM teaching and learning. As the need for high-quality STEM courses proliferates, the opportunity for hiring and placing highly effective STEM teachers will increase. Recruitment and retention efforts that attract the best talent into STEM teaching and support our best STEM teachers must include making sure that STEM teachers have adequate content and pedagogical knowledge of the subjects they're teaching and that STEM teachers are both professionally supported and equitably distributed so that all students are exposed to rich STEM learning opportunities.

In addition to supporting our nation's STEM teachers, schools and communities must also give students every opportunity to explore science with their hands and minds both inside and outside of the classroom. In particular, efforts must be made to broaden participation in STEM to include minorities, women/girls, and other underrepresented populations. Preparing *all* students to be both successful in and inspired by STEM requires hands-on experience with engaging and meaningful projects, including STEM competitions and science fairs exhibiting original student research. Addressing both achievement gaps and opportunity gaps will be necessary in order to ensure that underrepresented students engage in STEM in both formal and informal settings. Nearly every national report on improving STEM learning calls for expanded opportunities for students to apply mathematics to important problems, invent and make things using science, and create new works using technology and engineering skills. As students become inspired in their studies of STEM fields, the nation must also increase

opportunities for them to pursue advanced STEM coursework and have rigorous STEM-based research experiences prior to entering postsecondary study or the workforce.

In alignment with the Five-Year Federal Strategic Plan on STEM education and the Administration's government-wide STEM education reorganization proposal, the Department will also leverage partnerships with other Committee on STEM (CoSTEM) agencies to leverage federal assets to improve their reach and increase the quality of STEM teaching and learning through such strategies as building networks among school districts, post-secondary institutions, and other STEM content providers and aligning in-classroom and out-of-classroom STEM experiences. The Department has been designated the government-wide lead agency on improving P-12 STEM instruction.

GOAL 3: EARLY LEARNING. Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.

The foundation of a thriving middle class is a strong education. But millions of children in this country can't reach the first rung on the ladder of opportunity because they are cut off from access to high-quality early learning experiences. The first years of a child's life are the most critical for brain development,[11] and strong and consistent evidence from research and evaluation demonstrate that participation in high-quality early learning programs can lead to both short- and long-term positive outcomes for children from both low-income and middle-class families.[12, 13] Research finds that high-quality preschool programs can serve as effective early intervention programs for children with special needs[14] and provide significant benefits to English Learners.[15] Study after study show the benefits of high-quality early learning, including increased school readiness, lower rates of retention and special education placements, improved high school graduation, and higher rates of college attendance and completion.[16]

Children from low-income families, on average, start kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind their peers in pre-reading and language skills.[17] Results from the "Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11," indicate scores on reading and math were lowest for kindergartners in households with incomes below the federal poverty level and highest for

---

[11] Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). *A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children*. http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu

[12] Center for Public Education (2008). *The Research on Pre-K*. Alexandria, VA.

[13] Bartik, Timothy J., William Gormley, and Shirley Adelstein (2011). "Earnings Benefits of Tulsa's Pre-K Program for Different Income Groups." Upjohn Institute Working Paper 11-176. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. http://research.upjohn.org/up_workingpapers/176/.

[14] Phillips, D. A. and Meloy, M. E., (2012). *Exceptional Children, Council for Exceptional Children,* Volume 78, Number 4.

[15] Galindo, Claudia (2010). "English Language Learners' Math and Reading Achievement Trajectories in the Elementary Grades" in *Young English Language Learners: Current Research and Emerging Directions for Practice and Policy*, ed. Eugene E. Garcia and Ellen C. Frede. (New York: Teachers College Press), 42–57.

[16] Barnett, W. S. (2008). *Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved [August 12, 2013] from http://epicpolicy.org/publication/preschooleducation/.

[17] Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

those in households with incomes at or above 200 percent of the federal poverty level.[18] Additionally, children with a primary home language of English scored higher in reading and math than those coming from homes with a primary home language other than English. High-quality early learning provides the foundation for children's success in school and helps to mitigate educational gaps that exist for children with high-needs before they enter kindergarten. By increasing access to high-quality early learning programs and services, the country can work to close, or even prevent, the achievement gap.

The Obama administration is committed to closing that unjust gap through one of the boldest proposed expansions of early learning opportunities in a generation. The signature program in this effort is Preschool for All, a groundbreaking new federal-state partnership that would provide voluntary, high-quality preschool to all 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families. The program would also create incentives for states to expand publicly funded preschool to middle-class families above 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and promote access to high-quality full-day kindergarten and early learning programs for children under the age of 4. The administration is also proposing Preschool Development Grants to support state efforts to establish the infrastructure for high-quality preschool. This will enable more states with preschool systems at various stages of development to provide universal access to high-quality preschool for 4 year-old children from low- and moderate-income families. President Obama's Preschool for All proposal is a key part of the administration's overall strategy to provide all children with the high-quality foundation that will prepare them for success in school and in life. As part of this strategy, the administration is also proposing Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships in the Department of Health and Humans Services (HHS) to improve the quality of early learning programs for infants and toddlers, and expanding HHS's voluntary evidence-based home visiting services. In addition, the administration has proposed an increase in funding for the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*) Part C program to continue to support high-quality services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

These quality early learning efforts build on significant work from the administration's first term and ongoing federal investments in programs serving young children, including over $5 billion invested in early childhood programs through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (*ARRA*), as well as Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), a program jointly administered by ED and HHS. The program has rewarded states that have agreed to raise the bar on the quality of their early learning programs, establish higher standards, and provide critical links with health, nutrition, mental health, and family support. RTT-ELC states serve as model early learning and development systems, and are part of a national technical assistance strategy to reach all states. Only by coordinating the patchwork of early learning programs and services, and better integrating them with the elementary and secondary education system, can an integrated early learning system be built that improves health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for children from birth through third grade. A high-quality, coordinated early learning system includes program standards, comprehensive assessment systems, workforce and professional development systems, family and community engagement, health promotion, and data systems.

---

[18] Mulligan, G.M., Hastedt, S., and McCarroll, J.C. (2012). *First-Time Kindergartners in 2010-11: First Findings From the Kindergarten Rounds of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-11* (ECLS-K:2011) (NCES 2012-049). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved [date] from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/.

In supporting the alignment of these systems, the administration will focus its efforts on improving outcomes for children with high needs by ensuring that they have access to high-quality early learning programs with demonstrated success in closing achievement gaps and reducing grade retention rates in later years. To enhance the quality of these programs and services, and improve outcomes for children from birth through third grade, including children with disabilities and those who are English learners, the Department will promote initiatives that increase access to high-quality, effective programs, improve the quality of the early childhood workforce, and support comprehensive assessment systems.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in improving the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, particularly those with high needs, to ensure they are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.

Early Learning Indicators of Success

- Increase the number of states that have a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in place
- Increase the number of states with a workforce knowledge and competency framework or system in place[19]
- Increase number of states collecting and reporting disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

The president's proposal would provide the biggest increase for early education in this century. But it will require a bipartisan commitment from Congress to invest in our future and a belief by all Americans in the urgency of acting now. In 1971, Congress enacted a law that provided free, universal access to early childhood services and child care for children from low-income families. President Nixon vetoed that law. In the 42 long years since then, the evidence that high-quality early learning works has multiplied many times over. But the U.S. meanwhile has fallen far behind high-achieving countries in the provision of high-quality early learning.

Our plan to expand access to high-quality programs and services, improve the competencies of early childhood educators, and promote statewide comprehensive assessment systems will require a bold commitment from the federal government with additional authorization and appropriations from Congress. Additionally, significant coordination with HHS, state and local agencies, schools, community-based providers, early childhood stakeholders, postsecondary institutions, and other professional development providers will be required. But the investment in high-quality early learning can fundamentally change the outcomes in children's lives. Those who attend such programs have fewer special needs as they move through school; they get better jobs; they achieve better health; they commit fewer crimes. In turn, our nation will benefit, becoming more prosperous and globally competitive.

---

[19] Barnett, W. S., et al. *The State of Preschool: 2012 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University. 2012.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.1: ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.
Increase access to high-quality early learning programs and comprehensive services,
especially for children with high needs.**

A major obstacle facing families with young children is the lack of access to and
knowledge about high-quality early learning programs and services. High-quality early
learning programs, based on nationally recognized standards such as those established
by the Nationals Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), include the
following elements: high staff qualifications, including a bachelor of arts for teachers;
professional development for teachers and staff; low staff-child ratios and small class
sizes; a full-day program; developmentally appropriate, evidence-based curricula and
learning environments that are aligned with states' early learning standards; an inclusive
program; employee salaries that are comparable to those for K-12 teaching staff;
ongoing program evaluation to ensure continuous improvement; strong family
engagement; and onsite comprehensive services for children. Children who attend such
early learning programs, and receive evidenced-based instruction that is individualized
to their learning needs, do measurably better in school than their peers who do not
attend such programs. However, there is a large gap in access to these opportunities
between children from low- to moderate-income families and those from higher-income
families, with a disproportionately high gap for children with disabilities and Hispanic
children.[20] For children with disabilities, individualized accommodations or adaptations
may be needed to ensure that they have access to and full participation in high-quality
early learning programs. Families and children with disabilities may have difficulty
accessing and participating fully in high-quality inclusive programs because of the
shortage of appropriately trained staff; transportation and other logistical problems;
and difficulties coordinating early intervention and child care services.[21] Between 2009
and 2011, about 63 percent of Hispanic children did not attend preschool, compared
with 50 percent of white children.[22] According to data from the National Center for
Education Statistics, less than a third of children in poverty attend high-quality
preschool programs. In addition, in the 2011–12 school year, only 15 percent of 3-year-
olds and 42 percent of 4-year-olds attended state-funded preschool, Head Start, or
preschool special education programs.[23] Moreover, state early learning program
standards continue to vary widely, and only four states meet all 10 benchmarks for high-
quality standards, as defined by the National Institute for Early Education Research
(NIEER). These states represent only a small percentage of the children enrolled in state-
funded preschool, with the vast majority of children served in programs which that may
be inadequate for providing a high-quality education.[24]

The Department can address the challenge most families face in accessing high-quality
early learning programs by helping to increase the availability of these programs and by
promoting the transparency of information around enrollment opportunities and the
quality of programs. Many families—especially those in rural and urban communities

---

[20] U.S. Department of Education, NCES (2007). School Readiness Survey of the National Household Education Survey (NHES)."

[21] Jack P. Shonkoff & Deborah Phillips, eds.(2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early
Childhood Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Science, pp. 324.

[22] The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013). *2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book.* www.aecf.org.

[23] Barnett, W. S., et al. (2012). *The State of Preschool: 2012 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education
Research, Rutgers University.

[24] Ibid.

and those with children with disabilities—often do not have the information necessary to identify nor distinguish high-quality programs from those that are not. In order to be successful later in school and in their careers, children need high-quality early learning experiences that focus on all the essential domains of school readiness: language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and science development), approaches toward learning, physical well-being, and motor development (including adaptive skills), and social and emotional development.[25]

Any discussion of the quality and effectiveness of an early learning program must include the transparency provided, such as that reflected in a state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) or Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) as promoted through the ED and HHS jointly-administered RTT-ELC program. This systemic approach to assessing, improving, and communicating the level of quality in early learning programs should include some indication of how children are progressing across multiple domains of learning. Twenty-three states have begun to develop and implement a TQRIS, and many other states are in the process of designing and piloting one.[26] However, the quality of these systems varies widely, and many states lack robust tools for monitoring quality and providing feedback to providers and families. The Department and HHS are working together to support states in their TQRIS efforts as they define program standards and levels of quality; monitor program outcomes through continuous feedback with data, including child outcome data; and link the TQRIS to state professional development systems. The TQRIS will give administrators and policy- makers the information they need to make informed programmatic decisions and will inform families and the public about the quality of early learning programs.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.2: EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE. Improve the quality and effectiveness of the early learning workforce so that early childhood educators have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to improve young children's health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes.

Creating high-quality early learning programs depends in large part on having a high-quality early learning workforce. Unfortunately, far too often, such professionals are not sufficiently prepared, supported, or compensated. Qualifications, including education level, required for the workforce vary greatly by state and program. For example, only 58 percent of state-funded preschool programs require that all lead teachers have a bachelor's degree and less than one-third require that assistant teachers have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential.[27] In many preschool settings, the only educational requirement to enter the field is a high school diploma and a few early childhood classes. Teacher preparation programs and professional development often lack training in common high-quality professional competencies. The result is that not all

[25] These five domains of early learning are adopted from those identified by the National Education Goals Panel. Sharon Lynn Kagan et al. (1995). *Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning: Toward Common Views and Vocabulary*. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

[26] Kauerz, K. & Thorman, A. (March 2011).*QRIS and P-3: Creating Synergy Across Systems to Close Achievement Gaps and Improve Opportunities for Young Children, Build Initiative*.

[27] Barnett, W. S., et al. *The State of Preschool: 2012 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University. 2012.

members of the early learning workforce are adequately trained on the full range of developmentally appropriate, evidence-based practices that are proven to improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes of all young children.

The federal government can address these workforce challenges by supporting more robust early learning workforce preparation and professional development efforts, and promoting common, statewide workforce knowledge and competency frameworks designed to support children's learning and development, and to improve outcomes. Developing and advancing state workforce frameworks will help states build unified professional development systems and concentrate their training efforts around what matters most. Building statewide early learning workforce data systems that include information on aggregated data for workforce development, education, credentials, professional development, advancement, and retention could help states and districts improve the effectiveness and retention of the workforce.

The Department can also play an important role in encouraging states and districts to focus components of K–3 teacher preparation and professional development on evidence-based, developmentally appropriate approaches. These are not always emphasized in teacher preparation programs and in joint professional development opportunities for K–3 and preschool teachers, including professionals from community-based early learning programs. High-quality preschool programs are not a "magic bullet;" they must be followed by strong elementary school programs. Strategies to improve the quality and effectiveness of the birth-to-third-grade workforce will have a significant impact on children's success in school and in life.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.3: MEASURING PROGRESS, OUTCOMES, AND READINESS. Improve the capacity of states and early learning programs to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems.

Early childhood professionals, like other education professionals, need information about the process and context of young children's learning and development in order to make informed instructional and programmatic decisions that improve educational outcomes. This data is generated through a comprehensive early learning assessment system, a coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments that organizes information about the process and context of young children's learning and development. This system includes, at a minimum, a coordinated screening and referral system, ongoing formative assessments, measures of environmental quality and adult-child interactions, and a kindergarten entry assessment (KEA). Screening measures are age and developmentally appropriate, valid, and reliable instruments that are used to identify children who may need follow-up services to address developmental, learning, or health needs in, at a minimum, the areas of physical health, behavioral health, oral health, childhood development, vision, and hearing. Formative assessments are specifically designed to monitor children's progress in meeting the Early Learning and Development Standards, and to link directly to the curricula, and are used to guide and improve instructional practices. Measures of environmental quality are indicators of the overall quality of the early learning environment. Measures of the quality of adult-child Interactions are used in observing how teachers and caregivers interact with children

and promote child learning, and then identify strengths and areas for improvement for early learning professionals.

A KEA is an assessment administered to children during the first few months after kindergarten enrollment; covers all essential domains of school readiness; and is aligned to the state's early learning and development standards. A high-quality KEA, one which is used in conformance with the recommendations of the National Research Council[28] reports on early childhood, provides critical information about children's learning and development at kindergarten entry. Families use this information to provide support for children at home. Teachers use this information to modify instruction, adapt curricula, and focus professional development needs. In addition, a high-quality KEA should provide information to support effective programmatic decisions and better target investments in the years before kindergarten. Results of the assessment should be used to inform efforts to close the school readiness gap during kindergarten and support success in the early elementary school grades. This assessment should not be used to prevent children's entry into kindergarten.

Through the Race To The Top-Early Learning Challenge program, the Department collaborates and coordinates with HHS to promote the development and implementation of comprehensive early learning assessment systems and ensure that their implementation includes professional development for teachers and other administrators; the use of appropriate tools, each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used; and a method for conveying assessment results to families. Collecting, organizing, and understanding evidence of young children's progress across a range of domains through a comprehensive assessment system, and integrating this evidence into a P-12 data system, can ensure that all children are on the path to success in school and in life.

---

[28] National Research Council (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How. Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children*, C.E. Snow and S.B. Van Hemel, Editors. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Board on Testing and Assessment, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12446/.

GOAL 4: EQUITY. Increase educational opportunities for and reduce discrimination against underserved students so that all students are well-positioned to succeed.

President Obama and Secretary Duncan have both recognized the critical importance of educational equity.[29] While equity-related objectives are infused throughout the Department's comprehensive programs and reform initiatives, the purpose of this goal is to coordinate and promote the pursuit of educational equity across the Department, using all the levers within the Department's power to close opportunity gaps; to get the right resources to the students who need them the most; to end discrimination, harassment, bullying, and other barriers to education; and to buttress these and other equity-related efforts through civil rights enforcement and public engagement.

The Department is committed to pursuing equity at all stages of education, from birth through adulthood, in institutions of early learning, K–12 schools, career and technical and postsecondary education, as well as in adult education, and workforce development programs. The Department's goal is to ensure that all—not just a subset—of the nation's children, youths, and adults graduate high school and obtain the skills necessary to succeed in college and/or to pursue a meaningful career. This includes racial, ethnic, and religious minority students; low-income students; English learners; students with disabilities; girls and women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students; and students who live in geographical locations with greater barriers to or fewer opportunities for an equitable education.

The Department also recognizes the need to systemically increase educational opportunities for underserved populations, including by exploring ways to increase equitable access to resources and effective teachers within states and districts. While the federal government is not the primary supplier of school funding—contributing only roughly 10 percent of the total education cost at the school level—the Department is committed to exploring ways to encourage states and districts to act more vigorously to close funding and resource gaps. Moreover, studies show that having a strong teacher is the single most important in-school contributor to a student's success.[30] Because of this, and regardless of how teacher effectiveness is defined, it is critical that the nation eliminate disparities between the effectiveness of teachers who serve high-need students—including low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities—and those who do not. By fostering improved teacher evaluation systems and talent pipelines from recruitment to retention, the Department aims to elevate the teaching profession as a whole while also working to ensure that all students – no matter their zip codes – have equitable access to effective teachers.

Finally, civil rights enforcement is pivotal to ensuring that recipients of federal financial funding at the pre-K, K–12, and postsecondary levels eliminate acts of discrimination that, left unchecked, would otherwise negatively impact students' achievement and access to educational opportunities. The Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) uses a variety of tools to ensure compliance with federal civil rights laws, including issuing detailed policy guidance; conducting vigorous complaint investigations; procuring strong systemic remedies; pursuing aggressive

---

[29] Helene Cooper, "Obama Takes Aim at Inequality in Education, " *The New York Times*, April 6, 2011; Abby Phillip, "Education reforms spark 'quiet revolution,'" *Politico*, July 27, 2010.
[30] Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Nation's Future* (2010); Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, "Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement," Econometrica 73, no. 2 (March 2005).

monitoring of resolution agreements; launching targeted and proactive compliance reviews and technical assistance activities; collecting and publicizing school-level data on important civil rights compliance indicators; and participating in intra- and inter-agency work groups to share expertise and best practices. OCR also engages students, parents, recipients of federal funding, and other stakeholders to inform them about applicable federal civil rights laws and policies so that they are equipped to identify and address civil rights issues at the earliest stages.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in increasing educational opportunities for and reducing discrimination against underserved students. The Department's work related to equity is pervasive, and, as a result, measures related to equity are in both this section and in every other section.

Equity Indicators of Success

- Increase the national high school graduation rate, including for poor and minority students, English Learners, and students with disabilities.
- Increase number of states that use effectiveness data from educator evaluation systems to ensure that poor and minority students, as well as students with disabilities and English Learners, are not taught by ineffective educators at higher rates than other students
- Increase percentage of proactive civil rights investigations launched annually that address areas of concentration in civil rights enforcement
- Increase percentage of proactive investigations resolved annually that address areas of concentration in civil rights enforcement

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Equity-focused efforts could be held back because of differences in availability of funding and resources at the state and local levels, preexisting contractual obligations, the fact that state and local resources are often not targeted at the highest-need students, and the lack of necessary capacity among schools and districts to close achievement or opportunity gaps and provide needed supports for all students. The ability to foster more equitable distribution of resources may be more difficult because of the decentralized and multi-tiered school finance system in the United States.   Further, delays in the development and implementation of high-quality educator evaluation systems could hinder the Department's efforts in ensuring the equitable distribution of effective educators within and across schools and districts. In addition, advancing education reform depends, in part, on the strong reauthorizations of the *ESEA* and other important equity-focused statutes—e.g., *Perkins CTE*, *IDEA*, and *HEA*.

Continuing budget cuts and reduction in staffing levels, coupled with an increase in the volume of civil rights complaints received, could compromise OCR's ability to perform labor-intensive proactive activities—i.e., preparing compliance reviews, providing technical assistance and outreach, and issuing important policy guidance, which help produce the greatest systemic change for students.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.1: EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. Increase all students' access to educational opportunities and remove barriers that students face based on their race, ethnicity, or national origin; sex; sexual orientation or gender identity; disability; English language ability; religion; socioeconomic status; or geographical location.

Just as the Department is leveraging its resources to close achievement gaps between students in different subgroup populations, it is also committed to closing the opportunity gaps at every level of the educational system, from preschool and K–12 to postsecondary, that present barriers to learning or achievement. Such barriers include lack of access to challenging courses, effective teachers and school leaders, sufficient resources and other supports, and safe and healthy learning environments. The Department recognizes that these barriers may, depending on their nature, disproportionately affect one or more student subpopulations, including racial and ethnic minority students; low-income students; students of faith; English learners; students with disabilities; girls and women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students; and students who live in geographical locations with greater barriers or fewer opportunities.

Therefore, as the Department pursues programs and activities designed to serve all students, it must also ensure that the specific needs of these underserved student subpopulations are being met. The Department also recognizes the need to systemically increase educational opportunities, including by exploring ways to better research, measure, and support the efficient use and equitable distribution of resources within states and districts based upon what each student needs in order to achieve at a high level.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.2: CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE. Ensure educational institutions' awareness of and compliance with federal civil rights obligations and enhance the public's knowledge of their civil rights.

To raise levels of achievement in an increasingly diverse nation, all students must be free from discrimination. OCR is charged with the vitally important task of ensuring that recipients of federal funds comply with the federal civil rights laws and that beneficiaries, including students participating in education programs offered by federally funded schools and colleges, are free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender-nonconformity and sex-stereotyping), disability, or age. This mandate embodies the nation's commitment to equality and educational opportunity and is central to its long-term prosperity.

Through complementary activities that include proactive technical assistance, complaint investigations, targeted compliance reviews, strong systemic remedies, aggressive monitoring of resolution agreements, policy guidance, intra- and inter-agency sharing of best practices, OCR is using, and will continue to pursue in FY 2014–18, an integrated approach to civil rights enforcement to address key civil rights areas. Areas of concentration in FY 2014-18 will include ensuring equitable access to effective teachers and school leaders and equitable resources for students regardless of race, color, or

national origin; reducing disparate discipline regardless of race, color, national origin, or disability; and fostering voluntary and lawful efforts to reduce racial isolation in K–12 schools and to achieve racial diversity in pre-K, K–12, and postsecondary schools.

In addition to the above areas of concentration, OCR will continue its work in other, equally important civil rights areas, including ensuring equitable access to college- and career-preparatory programs (including STEM courses and curricula) regardless of race, color, national origin, sex or disability; requiring equitable student participation in athletics regardless of sex, race, color, national origin, or disability; and reducing acts of discriminatory bullying, harassment, and violence that are motivated by students' race, color, national origin, sex or disability.

OCR will actively engage students, parents, and educational institutions so that they know their rights and responsibilities—and so that educational institutions can prevent, and if necessary, identify and remedy, potential civil rights violations at the earliest stages before they require OCR involvement. This will provide faster relief to impacted individuals and enable OCR to allocate its resources more effectively. OCR will enhance public engagement by revamping its website to be more informative to educational institutions, complainants, and the public; expanding the Civil Rights Data Collection (www.ocrdata.ed.gov) to include a wealth of new data to aid OCR in its own work and to assist the Department, states, districts, teachers, administrators, researchers, students and parents in identifying civil rights trends and issues at the local, state and national levels; and engaging key stakeholders at the school and district levels to increase civil rights awareness and compliance.

GOAL 5: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM. Enhance the education system's ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread use of data, research and evaluation, evidence, transparency, innovation, and technology.

Achieving the president's 2020 college attainment goal will require better and stronger systems, powered by reliable and usable information that informs decision making, as well as by innovation. Through this strategic plan, the Department aims to foster a culture of continuous systems improvement at the national, state, and local levels. To achieve this goal, the Department will support robust and comprehensive data systems that produce timely, relevant, and understandable information while properly protecting student privacy; strategic use of research, evaluation, and evidence in decision making at all levels; increased innovation; and effective and systemic use of technology.

The foundation for improving systemic capacity is an infrastructure that supports data-driven decision making. Stakeholders must have access to relevant, useful data in a timely fashion, and the skills to better understand and make use of the data. With relevant and actionable data and the ability to use it, policymakers and educators will be able to appraise how states, districts, schools, and students are currently performing; measure progress; pinpoint gaps; improve practice; better address student needs; and make sound decisions. States are developing systems that will yield the valid, reliable data that are essential to achieving these purposes, but there is much more work to do. The Department will continue helping states develop effective statewide longitudinal data systems, design voluntary common data standards to increase

interoperability, and develop the capacity of institutions and staff to utilize data to improve teaching and learning. These activities will help to generate an accurate picture of student performance and other critical elements, from early learning programs through postsecondary institutions and the workforce. At the same time, the Department will work through the government-wide Open Data Initiative to ensure that its own information and data are accessible to and useable by researchers, analysts, and developers in the general public.

Of course, the collection and use of data must be responsible and must appropriately protect student privacy. Stewards and users of data must remember that data describe real people and ensure that systems protect the rights of those people. But there is no need to sacrifice data-driven decision making to protect student privacy, and the Department will help practitioners in the field ensure they are properly protecting privacy, and communicating with parents and students about the proper use and management of student data.

Systemic improvement also requires research and evaluation so that decision makers at the national, state, and local levels have reliable evidence to inform their actions. The Department aims to support research that will make a difference by giving states, districts, and schools the information and evidence they need to identify the effective practices they need to adopt. This research will also help them focus scarce resources on investments most likely to have the greatest impact and become more dynamic learning organizations. In service of this, the Department will use its programmatic and research activities to incentivize the creation and use of evidence by stakeholders in the field. In addition, the Department will use evidence to inform its own policy making and program development, and will work to communicate the findings of its research and evaluation activities to the field in an engaging and relevant way, further increasing their impact.

The goals and actions in this strategic plan sharpen the focus on the need to generate bold and creative solutions, and aim to support innovation in partnership with other federal partners and private organizations with related missions. The Department will continue to stimulate innovations in education and provide funds needed to accelerate their design and adoption. It also will work with Congress to fill a gap in the research and development landscape by establishing an advanced research projects agency for education to pursue breakthrough developments in ways not possible using existing Department mechanisms.

The Department's vision for 21st-century learning also requires that schools have a 21st -century technology infrastructure, anchored around high-speed Internet. States, districts, and schools must have such infrastructure to incorporate cutting-edge methods for strengthening curriculum quality and delivery to meet more rigorous college- and career-ready standards; improving student access and engagement; developing comprehensive, formative, and summative assessment systems; and enhancing data management systems.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in enhancing the U.S. education system's ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread use of data, research and evaluation, evidence, transparency, innovation, and technology.

Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System's Indicators of Success

- Increase number of states linking K–12 data with early childhood data
- Increase number of states linking K–12 and postsecondary data with workforce data
- Increase number of high-value data sets published through Data.gov or ED.gov websites
- Decrease average time to close matters for the Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) and Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO)
- Increase number of new peer-reviewed, full-text resources added to the Education Resources Information Center
- Increase number of reviewed studies added to the What Works Clearinghouse database
- Increase percentage of new (non-continuation) reform-directed discretionary grant dollars that reward evidence
- Increase percentage of schools in the country that have Internet bandwidth speeds of at least 100 Mbps

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Efforts to ensure that robust, integrated data systems are linked with early childhood, postsecondary, and workforce-level data will be constrained by the amount of time, financial resources, and support available to states to carry out this work. State and local funding for data systems may be reduced due to continued budgetary pressures at all levels. Moreover, wide variations in the various data systems present unique challenges for each state. Some district data systems, for example, far surpass their own state's data system. Efforts to ensure that data systems lead to data-driven decision making may also encounter obstacles around privacy concerns that will need to be addressed.

The implementation of these strategies depends on the availability of resources for evaluation and research, which are typically more difficult to obtain than resources for services and program implementation. In addition, many of the activities supporting this goal will be carried out by contractors and grantees, and thus are, in part, dependent on the capacity and quality of research expertise that exists outside the Department. This variance in capacity may be more pronounced when it comes to interpreting and using evidence to drive decision making. Similarly, the evidence base in some areas is more robust than in others, which, at least in the short term, could affect the amount of Department funding tied to the existence of certain levels of evidence supporting a project. Additionally, there are the perceived and real challenges states and districts face in implementing programs in ways that can support the strongest possible studies and evaluations of those programs. Some of these challenges can be addressed through Departmental technical assistance, but others may arise.

As reflected by Strategic Objective 5.2, one ongoing challenge is to protect privacy while increasing accessibility to relevant information. For its part, the Department will continue to vigilantly safeguard all personally identifiable information while also helping education agencies make useful information available. The Department also will help stakeholders develop best practices in protecting privacy while still driving data-driven decision making. But no system is perfect, and concerns about privacy may deter stakeholders from embracing the use of data, regardless of the actual level of risk

presented. Another risk lies in finding the right balance of information as too much information could make it nearly impossible to find meaning within data. To avoid this problem, the Department must work with stakeholders to prioritize information and to determine what is most likely to help families make choices for their children, help teachers improve student learning, and enable decision makers to improve education institutions.

Education funding faces tremendous budgetary pressure across the country, putting investment in new programs, strategies, or processes at risk. In this time of decreasing budgets, technology infrastructure and other innovations might be seen as luxuries rather than as mission critical. Because the private sector currently does not find investment in education innovation as attractive as investment in innovation in other sectors, there is limited private funding to help bridge the gaps. And the promise of technology might be affected by variance in the capacity of states, districts, and schools to plan, implement, and support modern technology networks.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5.1: DATA SYSTEMS AND TRANSPARENCY. Facilitate the development of interoperable longitudinal data systems for early learning through employment to enable data-driven, transparent decision making by increasing access to timely, reliable, and high-value data.

To bring about a culture of continuous improvement, teachers, leaders, and other stakeholders in the education community need timely access to high-value data that will enable them to see and understand the factors related to student achievement and child development. However, for many, the infrastructure for this kind of data-driven decision making is not readily accessible. While states are making significant progress in developing data systems, too often data are maintained in a system particular to only one sector of the education community or are not shared in a timely manner with policymakers and practitioners. Time lags, data gaps, and difficulty accessing the information make it challenging for schools and districts to identify best practices, measure growth in student performance, and improve teaching and learning. Even when data are available and widely shared, in many cases they are not used to drive instructional practices or decision making. For these reasons, the Department will continue to assist states in developing longitudinal data systems capable of sharing key data elements across the education continuum from early learning to the workforce. Through these systems, for example, secondary schools can know how many of their students are enrolled in a postsecondary program, how many require remediation before actual courses for credit can be taken, and how many students persist in postsecondary coursework and obtain a postsecondary degree or credential.

Data are valuable only if they are usable and used. Thus, the Department will also provide support to the education community, including teachers and administrators, on how to understand and appropriately use data to inform transparent policies, instructional practices, and decision making. Currently, there is a lack of information on best practices for the use of data to improve instructional systems. While there is some capacity for using longitudinal data to improve outcomes for students, this capacity needs to be expanded. The Department will continue to invest in research and technical

assistance designed to increase this capacity. Furthermore, the Department will continue to work with stakeholders from early learning to workforce to develop voluntary, common data elements and definitions for longitudinal data systems to enhance interoperability both vertically—across levels of education—and horizontally—across state lines.

The Department is also committed to increasing access to its own data resources to ensure that policy analysts, researchers, and developers of the next generation of software applications have access to the Department's considerable range of data, and that stakeholders and the general public are informed about the scope and content of these data holdings. A primary mechanism for ensuring this access is through leadership in the government-wide Open Data Initiative.

Leadership is essential to ensure that innovative applications are disseminated and brought to scale.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5.2: PRIVACY. Provide all education stakeholders, from early childhood to adult learning, with technical assistance and guidance to help them protect student privacy while effectively managing and using student information.

High-quality data helps educators at all levels better serve the specific needs of their students, and public access to education data helps families and students make informed educational choices. Appropriate use of education data can allow stakeholders to assess what works and what does not; data can be used to fine-tune education programs, and to personalize and improve the delivery of education services. Stewards and users of education data, however, must always remain mindful of the need to protect the privacy of the people whom the data describe. To protect students' privacy while promoting legitimate and appropriate uses of students' data, the Department must help states, districts, schools, and institutions of higher education to achieve not only compliance with the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (*FERPA*) and other privacy statutes, but also to adopt privacy best practices.

The Department will provide guidance and technical assistance to the field on topics related to data stewardship and management, as well as transparency. It is important for education agencies, schools, and institutions to communicate effectively and clearly with parents and students about how their data is used and protected. To encourage meaningful conversations about the collection, use, and management of student data, the Department will provide states, districts, schools, and institutions of higher education with technical assistance on best practices for transparency in their data policies.

Additionally, the Department will itself respect individuals' privacy in its data releases and practices, including in its public release of information to inform the evaluation of education programs. Department data releases also serve to reduce burden on states and districts by proactively providing useful, privacy-protected data.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5.3: RESEARCH, EVALUATION, AND USE OF EVIDENCE. Invest in research and evaluation that builds evidence for education improvement; communicate findings effectively; and drive the use of evidence in decision-making by internal and external stakeholders.

During the past decade, the Department has made significant progress in this area by supporting rigorous, independent evaluations of education initiatives; defining and promoting standards for research on effectiveness; funding long-term research projects in education, as well as short-term work in response to immediate practitioner needs; investing in a variety of types of research, ranging from design and development to large-scale impact studies; using innovative models for tiered-evidence grant-making; and promoting the use of evidence to drive decision-making.

Over the next several years, the Department will build on this foundation. It will continue to develop and enhance the Department-wide evidence planning process so that it becomes the standard, expected mechanism through which Department officials identify priority needs for evidence and plan data analyses, technical assistance, research, and evaluations to address those needs. Over time, this process will align with and inform the Department's budget requests to Congress and its spending plans.

Through its mix of grants, contracts, and internal analytic work, the Department will support a balanced portfolio of research and evaluation on longer-term, complex issues in education, and short-term studies and analyses that address the needs of the Department's leaders and managers, and policymakers and practitioners in the field. In this work, the Department will support the use of research methods and designs that provide evidence that is as robust as possible and fit for the purpose. The Department will continue to engage practitioners and policymakers external to the Department in its research.

The Department will use evidence to inform its policymaking and program development. Furthermore, it will provide incentives and support external stakeholders in using evidence for their own policymaking and program development as well as to inform instructional practice. The Department will also encourage the recipients of its funds to rigorously evaluate their efforts and programs to generate more evidence about the effectiveness and functioning of programs.

The Department will seek to communicate findings from analysis, research, and evaluation—including those developed by grantees—in a clear and engaging way that is appropriate to the intended audience. This will require attention to traditional and emerging media; to supporting the development of models of clear writing, graphics, and presentation for practitioners; and to supporting and investigating how practitioners understand and use education data and research.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5.4: TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION. Accelerate the development and broad adoption of new, effective programs, processes, and strategies, including education technology.

To achieve the president's 2020 college attainment goal, the nation's education system will need to graduate many more college-ready students from high school, ensure they have access to postsecondary education, and support them as they complete their degrees—all while facing resource constraints. When other sectors of the economy need to become better, faster, or more productive, they innovate, often relying on technology for help. The education sector is no different, and the need for innovation— and its benefits—spans grade levels, curricular areas, and student needs.

A 21st-century infrastructure that harnesses modern technological advances and provides easy access to high-speed Internet can serve as a platform for greater innovation in education. Accordingly, the Department will continue to focus on ways to improve schools' technology infrastructure and effective use of technology. It will also continue to work with Congress to establish a new advanced research projects agency for education that will use directed research and development activities to pursue breakthrough technological innovations in teaching and learning.

Technology holds the potential to expand all students' opportunities to learn, including by supporting personalized learning experiences, providing dynamic digital content, and delivering more meaningful assessments. Technology can also help districts and schools support teachers in becoming more effective and better connected to the tools, resources, and expertise students need and help them meet more rigorous college- and career-ready standards. Technology-enabled instructional and assessment systems will be pivotal to improving student learning and generating data that can be used to continuously improve the education system at all levels. Innovative technology must be matched by innovative educational practices to maximize its potential to improve learning and instruction for all students, and it must be accessible to all students, including students with disabilities. Leadership is essential to ensure that innovative applications are disseminated and brought to scale.

GOAL 6: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CAPACITY. Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement this strategic plan.

To successfully implement this strategic plan, the Department must retool its organizational capabilities and areas of expertise. In particular, transforming the Department means developing a new approach to workforce and succession planning, and raising the competency levels of the employees using a strategic, disciplined and structured approach. To ensure the achievement of mission critical objectives, grants and contract management will be a strategic focus for improvement in long and short-term initiatives. These initiatives will strive to better support grantees in achieving their educational goals while also continuing to hold grantees accountable for meeting financial requirements and legal obligations. To do so, the Department will continue to build the skills and knowledge of its workforce, rethink how it monitors and intervenes with high-risk grantees as well as contractors, enhance workforce productivity through information technology and performance management, and transform the way the

Department interacts with states, districts, institutions of higher education, and other grantees across the country. The transformation will result in improved performance results, increased stakeholder collaboration, and higher employee engagement.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure the Department's success in building the organizational capacities needed to implement this strategic plan.

U.S. Department of Education Capacity Indicators of Success

- Decrease staffing gaps percentage
- Increase the Employee Viewpoint Survey's employee engagement index rating
- Decrease percentage of A-133 single audits overdue for resolution
- Increase compliance rate of contractor evaluation performance reports
- Increase percentage of states that annually rate the Department's technical assistance as helping build State capacity to implement education reforms
- Decrease number of ED IT security incidents
- Decrease time to hire
- Increase effective communication index rating

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

To be successful, these human capital initiatives will require support from the Department's supervisors, managers, and senior leaders. It will also require updates to internal policies and a strong, productive collaboration with the employees' union. In addition, the Department will need to improve upon its commitment to meaningful professional development and succession planning programs as well as the implementation of new technology to support improved collaboration among staff as well as with our grantees and partners.

Risk is inherent in the grants as well as contract management processes; therefore, no amount of improvement will completely eliminate risk. Risk is greater in areas of innovation, where there are fewer precedents, proven strategies, or track records upon which to draw in the assessment and management of risk. Data limitations and lack of timeliness can impede the Department's efforts in managing risk. Implementing unprecedented reform efforts will require states to develop new capacities that support effective teaching, school turnarounds, college- and career-ready standards, and effective use of data. In addition, states must develop new capacities to communicate and collaborate with each other to share effective practices. As with many other efforts, states' abilities to develop and implement these systems may be in jeopardy given the budget environment impacting states and districts.

Maximizing the impact of the Department's human capital and funding resources may be limited by several factors, including the lack of timely data for analysis. Additionally, a lack of resources to leverage new technologies and integrate data may limit the Department's and its grantees' ability to improve productivity. These limitations can create challenges for the pace at which new innovations, both technological and others can be developed and deployed.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6.1: EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE. Continue to build a skilled, diverse, and engaged workforce within the Department.

The agency's strategic goals must support postsecondary education, career and technical education, adult education, elementary and secondary education, early learning, equity, and continuous improvement of the U.S. education system. To accomplish this, the Department's workforce must be in the right position, at the right time, with the right skills, and at the right cost, led by skilled and engaging supervisors and managers. Visionary leaders, managers focused on improvement, and engaged employees are key drivers of organizational performance and results. The Department's sustained success in implementing this strategic plan will rely heavily on the knowledge, skills, expertise, and continual development of its employees, and an effective performance management program. The Department will focus its workforce effectiveness and planning efforts on all employees and principal offices, with a priority on mission-critical occupations and competencies required to achieve the strategic goals. The most urgent need for intervention is in the grants management and human capital occupations, leadership and supervisory skills, strategic performance management, employee engagement initiatives, quality hiring strategies, the development of foundational competencies, increased retention rates, and the implementation of strategic diversity workforce plans.

Furthermore, the Department must focus on ways to thrive in an operational climate that is significantly resource-constrained. This will spur opportunities to involve employees in thinking differently and smartly about strategies to reengineer, streamline, or even eliminate work that does not serve the efficiency of the Department in achieving its strategic goals and desired outcomes. This outcome is dependent on a human capital strategic plan, workforce and succession planning, and implementation strategies that ensure a premier consultative group of human capital professionals. This group should be adept at advising and providing guidance and support to customers on human capital initiatives and delivering strategic human capital solutions aligned with the goals of the Department and meeting the needs of the customers.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6.2: RISK MANAGEMENT. Improve the Department's program efficacy through comprehensive risk management, and grant and contract monitoring.

To support the president's education goals and ensure the prudent use of public dollars, the Department has enhanced its approach to measuring, identifying, and mitigating fiscal and programmatic risk through increased oversight and support of grantees and contractors.

Risk management plays a critical role in enhancing the capacity of grantees to implement needed reforms. It helps assess the ability of applicants to fulfill grant requirements, focus grant monitoring efforts, and identify performance challenges that can be addressed through measures such as enhanced technical assistance. Risk management is also an essential aspect of contract monitoring, achieved by actively assessing program and performance risk inherent in contracts through oversight and support, and issuance of policy and guidance to program and contract officials.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6.3: IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT. Build Department capacity and systems to support states' and other grantees' implementation of reforms that result in improved outcomes, and keep the public informed of promising practices and new reform initiatives.

The country has responded powerfully to the president's call to action for the United States to once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. Nationally, there is recognition of the urgency of improving education and its importance for international competitiveness. The Department has an unprecedented opportunity and responsibility to demonstrate how federal investment in and support of education lead to improved outcomes for students. There are ongoing, positive implications from the last four years of investment focused on four key reform areas and comprehensive reform.

Emboldened by the need, the aspirations, and the opportunities for resources and flexibility, states have a renewed focus on raising the bar and closing achievement gaps, and are executing plans to seize this opportunity. For example, 41 states and the District of Columbia are moving forward with ground-breaking reforms and innovations under *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (*ESEA*) flexibility; 19 states have received Race to the Top state grants; 14 states have received Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grants and another competition was just announced; 22 districts have received Investing in Innovation (i3) grants; and all states have received School Improvement Grant funds. To build on this momentum and to produce transformative, sustainable improvement in student outcomes, states and districts will have to focus on and commit to building expertise, skills, and systems that live well beyond any particular program or funding stream.

The Department has an important role to play in providing differentiated support and technical assistance to those pursuing this challenging work–even while continuing to improve the quality and reduce the burden of its fundamental stewardship function. To do so, the Department is moving from being an organization narrowly focused on one-size-fits-all compliance monitoring to an organization dedicated to progress and outcomes, and adept at both differentiating support to states and holding them accountable for meeting their programmatic, financial, and legal obligations.

To successfully scale up reforms, the Department needs to build capacity at all levels, from federal to state to local. The most effective approach for doing this is building "communities of practice" designed to accelerate problem solving, identify effective practices, and replicate them more efficiently. The Department is working diligently to build its capacity to lead such communities of practice and to help states and districts do the same. Race to the Top provides an opportunity for the Department to pilot a performance management structure with a set of reform-focused states and to use lessons learned to expand this approach to all states. *ESEA* flexibility creates a new relationship with states, and the opportunity for the Department to create state-focused support and management structures that are differentiated to states' individual contexts and needs.

Realizing the opportunities to build new relationships with states and stakeholders who are affected by Department reforms and grants requires a vibrant outreach and external affairs effort. The Department will have continuous communication with stakeholders and grantees to share lessons learned across grantees and non-grantees as well as with the general public. The Department will use its communications channels, such as its printed publications, the Homeroom blog site, YouTube videos, and speeches to tell the stories of success so that the public can learn from reforms being implemented at the state and local levels.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6.4: PRODUCTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT. Improve workforce productivity through information technology, process performance management systems, and leadership and knowledge management practices.

Similar to states and districts responsible for managing education systems, the Department must also continue to focus on ways to increase productivity, especially in this time of severely constrained resources. The Department is focusing on enhancing employee productivity and aligning performance management practices with departmental strategic objectives by aligning priorities and goals at every level in the organization. The Department will introduce additional productivity and performance analytics and reporting techniques, and continue to use tools such as quarterly operational reviews to ensure progress toward achieving the goals and outcomes in this plan. The Department is updating strategic goals to ensure alignment with government-wide goals and priorities. To translate these broader aspirations to specific organizational goals, the Organizational Performance Review will continue to be a paramount process for setting goals at the principal office level, assessing workforce, resourcing and infrastructure needs, and building and leveraging critical organizational capacities. These goals will be cascaded down to the individual employee level through Senior Executive Service plans and through the Department's individual performance plans and metrics.

The Department must continue to prioritize and support the learning and development of its leaders to become more adept at assessing employee competency gaps and developmental needs, distinguishing performance versus conduct issues, and providing meaningful and ongoing feedback and coaching to achieve planned outcomes so that employees will better understand and fulfill their roles, and be accountable for producing the expected results. To support the tracking and reporting of progress against all these goals, the Department has created and is developing its data profile on http://www.performance.gov for key policy and programmatic topics. It is also creating a set of information dashboards and data analysis tools to provide more relevance and context for senior leaders in gauging the impact of individual and collective performance, and in overall strategic decision making.

To foster a higher level of productivity and performance, and assure alignment among the strategic goals, more robust development and use of information technology are essential. The Department is improving technologies that directly affect productivity catalysts, such as collaboration, a flexible and mobile workforce, transparency across

the organization, analytics, cyber-security, rapid data archiving and retrieval, and streamlined document management and clearance processes. To improve employee collaboration, for example, the Department will leverage the engagED platform, which is an internal initiative that allows employees to suggest innovations, collaborate to develop those ideas, and elevate them to leaders for decisions and implementation. Similarly, key programs will be used strategically, such as Idea Engine and SharePoint, which both encourage online knowledge management and collaboration, document sharing, and management tools that help develop and support communities of practice among internal offices and colleagues. The Department will also seek greater productivity and improved performance by developing efficient and effective processes and capabilities that are among the best in the public and private sectors, by utilizing better business process management strategies and tools, and by encouraging employees to help identify smarter and more efficient ways to work.

The Department is creating an interactive internal communications system that spans across all its principal office components and business units. The goal is to provide accurate information about the Department's priorities to employees, as well as forums and feedback opportunities for them to share ideas and lessons learned to improve execution on those priorities. Productivity and performance will be enhanced because employees will receive the relevant content knowledge they need to be effective ambassadors for and partners in delivering on and achieving the mission of the Department. The Department believes that acting strategically to enhance clarity and openness in its communications will also strengthen its internal infrastructure, and benefit its key stakeholders, grantees, and others through improved results.

OUR MISSION IS TO PROMOTE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND PREPARATION FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS BY FOSTERING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS.

WWW.ED.GOV